Go for the gold
Three calf and heifer raisers weigh in on DCHA Gold Standards

We asked three calf and heifer raisers from across the U.S. how they’re using the Gold Standards in their calf and heifer raising programs. Here’s what they had to say:

What value do the Gold Standards bring to your farm/business?

Leick: It’s a great resource for us to use as a guide for our calf raising programs. It can also be used to inform consumers – like when we have tours we can show them the book and show the commitment and care we have for our animals.

Fisher: With the new facility we opened in February, the Gold Standards have given us a good way to assess our initial performance in the new facility and establish goals as well as determine new areas to improve.

Downs: The Gold Standards help calf raisers have somewhere to start and set goals. I set goals with Gold Standards – that’s what I think benefits me most.

What area of your calf and heifer raising business has the Gold Standards been most helpful?

Leick: It helps develop written protocols for treatments and recording them to maintain a good record keeping system. We have a lifetime record of calves as they come into production. Instead of waiting until they’re milk cows and then starting a treatment record, we start treatment records the day they are born.

Fisher: The three areas that have been the most helpful are health, growth and survival rates. Outside of reproduction, we hadn’t done a good job of tracking performance metrics. We now have good weights at five different points and a system in place to monitor the reports we produce based on the Gold Standards.

Downs: Our heifer calves – it helped us know where we were supposed to be as far as treatment rates and growth. In turn, that has helped us get more weight gain on our six-month old heifers all the way to our springers.

How have the Gold Standards assisted in the most challenging areas of your calf and heifer program?

Leick: It has helped me develop written cleaning programs that I can use on my operation to prevent scours. Scours is the most challenging area of my operation.

Fisher: We suspect our area for most improvement would be in survival rates. We use it to create a monthly report to evaluate where we are losing calves.

Downs: It helped us set a guideline and goals to help us achieve where we want to be. The most challenging thing I’ve ever faced on a dairy is how to get calves off to a great start. We print out our goals so everyone knows what we’re striving for and the Gold Standards helped us make those goals.

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In what way are you using the Gold Standards with your employees?

Leick: They’re helpful for training and monitoring employees. I can show them exactly why we’re doing what we do as far as cleaning protocols and other areas within the Gold Standards. It’s a good reference for employees to show that this is what the industry is striving to meet and exceed for standards.

Fisher: We haven’t used the Gold Standards with employees yet with the exception of our management team. We’ve established a monthly report that we look at and decide on some goals to go along with those metrics. In the future, we plan to use parts of the Gold Standards for training of employees in their specific areas.

Downs: Once a month we sit down and discuss our numbers from the previous month to set our goals. It’s hard to tell someone how to do a job right without letting them know why we do it – the Gold Standards help us show employees why we care for calves the way we do.

As you look to the future, what goals are of highest priority? How can the Gold Standards help you achieve those goals?

Leick: I’d like to decrease the scours incidence in my younger calves. I have autofeeder pens so that always seems to be a challenge in the group housing of the 10- to 20-day old calves. We like to call it a daycare center – when one of them gets sick, it seems like they all get sick. Following all the standards and working to exceed them, in addition to employee education, is where it’s the most helpful to me.

Fisher: Our priority is raising a healthy, productive uniform group of heifers at one site. It will help us by keeping a focus on multiple areas where we can improve so we don’t make progress in one area and fall behind in another.

Downs: Our average daily gains – it helps us set the standard of where we need to be and how to achieve them. We’re always striving to get our average daily gains higher, that way we can have first-lactation heifers come in and transition easier.

The Gold Standards are available to DCHA members. They are available in print and digital form. Get your copy of the Gold Standards at calfandheifer.org.

3 tips to boost performance when feeding pasteurized milk

Pasteurized milk can be a good option for feeding young calves, but providing a consistent, nutritious diet may be challenging. Consider these three tips to help boost performance in calves fed a pasteurized milk diet.

1. ENHANCE NUTRITION WITH A BALANCER

Adding a balancer can help improve calf performance by providing additional protein and energy without increasing volume. When balancer is added, calves receive a more consistent diet and have been shown to have increased growth.1 Also, whether it’s waste milk or milk from the bulk tank, whole milk lacks essential vitamins and minerals crucial to calf growth and development.

Pasteurized milk balancers add important nutrients such as vitamins A, D, E, C, and B vitamins and trace minerals to your calves’ diet.

2. LOOK FOR ADDED TECHNOLOGIES

Additional technologies found in a pasteurized milk balancer can help boost comfort and performance. Like milk replacers, pasteurized milk balancers can be enhanced with coccidostats to prevent coccidiosis and larvicides for fly control. Other additives such as MOS (mannan-oligosaccharides) and beta-glucan may help calves respond to health challenges.

3. IMPLEMENT PHASE FEEDING

Phase feeding can help improve consistency and digestive development, which are common challenges when feeding pasteurized milk.

To get started, feed calves milk replacer for the first 2-3 weeks of life. Slowly transition away from milk replacer by blending with pasteurized whole milk with balancer for 2-3 days before feeding just pasteurized milk and balancer.

Talk with your local calf and heifer specialist to determine opportunities to maximize your pasteurized milk nutrition program.

Information provided by Tom Earleywine, Land O Lakes Animal Milk Products, DCHA sponsor.